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DAN SMOOT

BOBBYISM

by Mabeth E. Smoot

President Johnson's withdrawal from the political race is an effort to escape the stigma of defeat, with a maneuver which he hopes history will record as selfless devotion to peace. Though his quitting is cause for national jubilation, it may help Robert F. Kennedy; and if any person could be worse for this country than LBJ, that person is RFK. For these reasons (and in response to requests already being made before Johnson's announcement), we reprint this article which originally appeared July 4, 1966.

In June, 1966, Robert F. Kennedy made a whirlwind tour of South Africa, at the invitation of the National Union of South African Students, whose leaders have been engaged for years in communist activity and sabotage against the South African government. He criticized South Africa's racial policy, and spent an hour with Albert Luthuli (African nationalist leader of communism) whom he praised as "one of the most impressive men I have ever met."(1)

A South African government official said of Bobby: "This little snip . . . has only been in this country for three days, and already he has the audacity to tell us what the remedies to our problems are."(1)

Perhaps the official does not realize that ignorant audacity is a primary characteristic of Bobby's effort to become President of the United States.

In 1962, Bobby refused to add The Fair Play For Cuba Committee to his Attorney General's list of subversive organizations, and declared that the U. S. communist party "can't do anything to us."(2) In 1963, after a communist member of The Fair Play For Cuba Committee assassinated the President, Bobby had to abandon his plan of succession to the throne, and to develop a new strategy and timetable. He made this adjustment by becoming an instant-New Yorker and Senator from that vote-glutted state — in a manner that reveals his character.

On June 23, 1964, Attorney General Bobby issued a press release:

"I wish to state that I will not be a candidate for the U. S. Senate from New York."(3)

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Two months later, Bobby announced that he was a candidate for the U. S. Senate from New York. Solemnly, he vowed:

"I shall devote all my efforts and whatever talents I possess to the State of New York. This I pledge."[4]

That pledge might very well have been made in good faith. Bobby could have been momentarily weary of travel. Earlier that year (in May), he had made a trial-balloon speech in Toronto, Canada, aligning himself and his political future with the "revolutionary" aims of youthful leaders in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, asserting that the young revolutionaries "will achieve their idealistic goals one way or another. If they have to pull governments tumbling down over their heads, they will do it . . . . We, in turn, are part of their revolution . . . ."[5]

In late June, 1964, Bobby had also visited Poland. The Warsaw Communist Party newspaper, *Trybuna Luda*, commented on his visit:

"He misbehaved . . . and was notoriously late for appointments, but we liked what he said."[6]

Bobby plunged into the 1964 New York Senate campaign (as one reporter said) "with a flourish of clarions, and plenty of money, with advance men and outriders." The press donated thousands of helpful words to his campaign fund. Here are excerpts from a rather typical pro-Bobby article in *The New York Times* (September 4, 1964), reviewing his "accomplishments as Attorney General":

"One of Mr. Kennedy's least publicized activities was his helping to reduce Communist-hunting excesses. He fought behind the scenes . . . . He directed immigration authorities to end political interrogation of people wishing to enter this country and he helped to permit the admission of foreign artists and other notables despite Communist affiliation."

With a record like that, plus all the talents he and his family possess, how could Bobby lose?

Going to the Senate was not an unmixed blessing for Bobby. Writing for *Harper's Magazine* (January, 1966), William V. Shannon, a Bobby enthusiast, explained:

"He chafes at the passivity of the legislator's role and simply has to have an outlet for his executive energies and talents. He is also drawn to the city and its agonizing problems because of his genuine sympathy . . . [for] the slum family, the lost young Negro, and the defeated old people . . . ."[7]

Shannon rounded out this heart-tugging image of Bobby by adding:

"When political self-interest reinforces instinct and concern, Kennedy cannot stay still in the sanctum of the Senate."

When entering the sanctum of the Senate, Bobby made another pledge: to uphold the Constitution of the United States. His voting record shows a 100% violation of that pledge — which is understandable: Bobby has proved his ignorance of the Constitution.[8]

Bobby's restlessness kept him out of Washington a great deal during 1965, but, while there, he was true blue to his political philosophy: he went down the line for all of President Johnson's Great Society programs. Even if he had been away from the Senate all year, his influence would not have been missed, because, in 1965, Congress was jumping through Lyndon Johnson's pass-or-perish legislative hoop far more meekly than it had ever performed for President Kennedy.

On the first anniversary of President Johnson's landslide political victory, the nation was preoccupied with a jungle 7,000 miles away where both victory and land were sliding from beneath the muddy, bloody boots of American soldiers. The nation was trying to remember: what *was* the foreign policy laid out in the Great Society platform? No one could answer that question satisfactorily, not even Bobby, who was one of the architects of the policy. Bobby did tell college students that Americans donating blood to communist guerrillas in Vietnam are acting "in the oldest traditions of this country"[9]; but that did not shed much light on the foreign policy whose

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consequences were troubling the people. What the country needed was a foreign policy expert, and Bobby set out to become one. In November, 1965, he announced a 12,000-mile tour of South America — ostensibly to examine our Alliance for Progress programs.

Bobby's official party on the South American trip included his wife and a full entourage of *functional* and *fun* people: schedule planners and path smoothers; bill payers and door openers; reporters and photographers; arty, intellectual friends and their friends; and two speech writers, one of whom had thoughtfully prepared for Bobby a book entitled *Easy Answers to Hard Questions.*[10]

From his first stop in Lima, Peru, to the end of his 20-day pilgrimage, Bobby slummed with unflagging zest. With the patrician curiosity of one who never labored for a living, he inspected the working conditions of cane-cutters and miners — and castigated "capitalist" employers for breeding the seeds of communism among workers.[10]

And always, he seemed driven by a powerful inner compulsion to prove his physical prowess. With the brash, adolescent self-confidence of a Hyannis Port Cassius Clay, he challenged companions to uphill footraces; leaped wide ditches to greet peasants in the fields; sprinted through damp mine tunnels; played water football in a lake infested with flesh-eating piranha fish.[10]

In an eight-hour canoe trip, often foundering in rapids, Bobby jumped in and out of the water, mimicking a well-known television commentator saying in a future broadcast:

"It was impossible to pinpoint the exact time and place when he decided to run for President. But the idea seemed to take hold as he was swimming in the Amazonian river of Nhamunda, keeping a sharp eye peeled for man-eating piranhas."[10]

Yet, at every stop on his tour, Bobby told reporters:

"I am not thinking of running for the Presidency . . . . I have a high feeling for President Johnson . . . . I would support his bid for re-election in 1968, and I strongly wish to campaign for him."[10]

Andrew J. Glass, who was in Bobby's entourage, told about the South American trip in *The Saturday Evening Post*:

"By any standard his trip was a success. But it also managed to unnerve a round of ambassadors, CIA agents, hapless policemen, soldiers and protocol-minded Latin officials — their best-laid plans repeatedly wrecked by the 'Candidate' — who, on one gay evening, laughingly acknowledged that he was indeed running for 'president of the world.' . . .

"Kennedy was an hour late . . . for a private lunch with Chilean President Eduardo Frei . . . . [but Kennedy] was elated by the encounter: His own ideas closely parallel Frei's belief that the crucial issue in Latin America is not the struggle between the forces of Communism and anti-Communism, but rather whether Communism or the democratic left will lead the revolution against oligarchy . . . .

"[In Santiago's slums] Kennedy stepped over the sewage and walked into many of the hovels, asking questions about the slum-dwellers' lives, smiling sadly at the replies and giving away PT-boat tie clasps of the kind his brother used in the 1960 campaign."

Reporter Glass did not indicate that Bobby ever passed out anything vulgar — like *money* — to the impoverished children whose plight disturbed him so deeply.

Bobby invited himself to make a speech at the University in Concepcion. Communist student leaders asked him to stay away, and the University rector said his visit would be "most inadvisable." But Bobby went; and Mr. Glass reported what happened in the University gymnasium:

"Kennedy walked slowly around the . . . gym floor . . . . he passed beneath the section where about 100 Communists were seated. They gave a great animal-like howl and let fly a barrage of eggs, bits of garbage . . . .

"Kennedy reached the lectern . . . . 'Go home, go home, you yankee son of a whore,' the Communists chanted . . . .

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"Kennedy sat down . . . . and waited silently, a slight smile crossing his lips. Ten noisy minutes passed . . . . Suddenly Kennedy hopped on the table . . . .

" 'I believe in freedom,' he shouted looking up at the Communists . . . . No one standing more than a few yards away could hear a word he was saying.

" 'I do not come tonight to say that the United States is without fault,' (Kennedy shouted every word) 'All human beings make mistakes. But we support your revolution with all our hearts because you are making the same effort we are making in the United States . . . . We support your effort to build a new society . . . . '

" 'Assassin,' the young Communists screamed . . . . The curses . . . were no longer printable . . . . Kennedy leaped off the platform. We pushed our way toward the Communists . . . . He stood on a chair . . . the Communists . . . spat, hitting the senator directly in his right eye. The spittle dripped down his cheek . . . . Kennedy's arm was still outstretched. Another student . . . began kicking at Kennedy's hand . . . . Kennedy climbed off the chair . . . .

" 'Let's go,' he said. 'We've done what we came to do.'

"Ethel was watching all this from the sidelines, along with a man from the embassy. As Kennedy moved toward the door, the Communists in the stands set a U.S. flag afire. The Embassy man giggled nervously . . . ."

But the trip was not without music and laughter. Orphans in Brazil sang *God Bless America* to Bobby. For children on the road to Manacupuru, Bobby sang *We Shall Overcome.*[10]

In Natal, Bobby was at his best. More than 100,000 people came to see him. He jumped on top of a truck to speak:

"Every child an education! Every family adequate housing! Every man a job! . . . As long as there is a Kennedy in public life in the United States, there will be a friend of northeast Brazil!"[10]

The cheers were deafening!

If you are not a wealthy humanitarian like Bobby, but are just a plain working American taxpayer, you may be churlish and selfish enough to yearn for *men* "in public life in the United States" who will be friendly to *us* — friendly enough to stop playing Robbing-Hood with *our* tax money.

But such thoughts spoil the mood. This is a commentary on *Bobbyism* — not *Americanism.*

FOOTNOTES

(1) "With Robert Kennedy In White Africa," *U. S. News & World Report*, June 20, 1966, p. 46; "South Africa: Who Needs Kennedy?", *The New York Times*, June 12, 1966, Sec. 4, p. 2; "Bobby's African Safari," *Human Events*, June 18, 1966, pp. 3-4

(2) "Bobby Drags Heels," Washington Report by Fulton Lewis, Jr., *The Shreveport Journal*, April 12, 1962; UPI dispatch from Washington published March 7, 1962

(3) UPI story from Washington, *The Dallas Morning News*, June 24, 1964, p. 1

(4) "Kennedy Enters Race For Senate," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1964, pp. 1, 30

(5) Allen-Scott Report, *Newport Harbor News Press & Daily Pilot* (Calif.), May 21, 1964

(6) AP story from Warsaw, Poland, *The Dallas Morning News*, July 6, 1964, Sec. 1, p. 3

(7) "Lindsay, Kennedy, and the Power Struggle in New York," by William V. Shannon, *Harper's Magazine*, January, 1966

(8) "Remarks by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy at Ceremonies Celebrating the 175th Anniversary of the Ratification of the Constitution," Department of Justice Press Release, June 21, 1963

(9) UPI story from Albuquerque, *The Sacramento Bee*, November 7, 1965, p. 22A

(10) "The Compulsive Candidate," by Andrew J. Glass, *Saturday Evening Post*, April 23, 1966

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